

## House Republican Press Release

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### **Rep. Harkins Introduces Legislation To Establish Oversight Process For State Legal Expenses**



*Bill would create selection system for large state legal contracts*

State Rep. John Harkins, R-Stratford has introduced legislation to establish an oversight process for certain state legal expenses. House Bill 5143, An Act Concerning The Retention Of Outside Legal Counsel By State Agencies, would require open, competitive bidding for contracts to outside legal counsel that exceed \$1 million. Elements of the bill may be included in a package of ethics reform legislation expected to be voted on by both chambers of the General Assembly in the coming weeks, said Rep. Harkins.

Currently, there is no bidding requirement in contracting with outside legal counsel. Also, state departments and agencies have full discretion over which legal firms are selected. Rep. Harkins noted that his proposal would also require full disclosure of a firm's past or present business relationships with state elected public officials and a public hearing on each contract for legal counsel.

"This bill would allow disclosure and public input on the hiring of outside legal counsel for large contracts," said Rep. Harkins, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader. "By bringing what has long been a private selection process into the open, taxpayers in Connecticut will at least know if they are getting value for services rendered."

Rep. Harkins added that for example, four separate law firms were chosen by the State Attorney General to represent Connecticut in the national tobacco settlement lawsuit. Approximately \$65 million in total legal fees were paid to these firms. However, there is no information on how the firms were chosen, their expenses or hours billed.

"We do not have this information because these firms negotiated their fees with the tobacco companies, not the State of Connecticut," said Rep. Harkins. "When these firms negotiated fees, whose interest did they have in mind? Perhaps our state could have received a larger settlement if the legal firms had taken less compensation. Four law firms were chosen without any oversight and received \$65 million in compensation. The bill I am proposing would ensure that no such contract ever be granted again without the knowledge of state residents and full disclosure. The door has been wide open for abuse and needs to be shut."

